

# Pyrotechnics 54

November 1994

## Put Not Your Faith in PVC (three cautionary tales)

by Tim Eisele

When one needs a bracing member, or a pipe, or electrical insulation, or something like that in a prototype gizmo, there is a strong temptation to use PVC pipe. It is, after all, fairly lightweight, cheap, electrically insulating, easy to glue and cut, cheap, available in many sizes and shapes, cheap, moderately temperature-resistant, cheap, easy to get, and above all, cheap. This makes it sound like practically a dream material.

Do not be deceived. PVC has many faults, which you will discover if you make the mistake of attempting to use it in a Critical Application. I speak from sad and bitter experience. Hear my tales of woe.....



### Case #1: The Catapult

In Pyro #52, Fred Robinson mentioned that I had built a catapult, and even showed a rather nice photograph of it. Being a kind soul, Fred didn't mention that it was a fiasco. There were several things wrong with it, but the fatal error was using PVC pipe as the throwing arm. Now, in a catapult, the mass of the throwing arm robs you of both

speed and payload, because the spring and/or counterweight have to move the arm around. So, I thought, "Hey, if I use PVC pipe as the arm, it will be really light, and should be stiff enough....." Big mistake.

The 3/4" diameter PVC was all right under its own weight, with an 8' length only sagging a little bit when held horizontally. But, when I put a 1/2 lb weight on the end, and tried to lift it with the arm, it bent rather like a noodle (not buckling, just bending into about a 90 degree arc without the weight leaving the ground). This was obviously not good, and I should have started looking into other materials right there, but being stubborn, I persisted.

Next, I filled the pipe with wooden dowels, and injected liberal amounts of wood glue so that they would adhere. This made it a *lot* stronger, so I tried the weight-lifting bit again. This time, it actually lifted the weight, and only bent into a 45 degree arc. So, I went ahead and mounted it on the catapult, and put on Dacron guy-lines to keep it from bending (Dacron supposedly has very little stretch compared to Nylon, and the lines were pretty tight). When the whole apparatus was finally assembled at the Wicker farm, it looked fine, so we cocked it, loaded it up, and fired....

The arm flexed wildly, shaking off the guy-lines in much the same way that a wet dog shakes off water. The payload (a ball of cement weighing about a half-pound) smacked into the ground vigorously a whopping 6 feet in front of the apparatus, and lay there, smirking. The throwing arm waved gently in the breeze... With some effort, we ultimately got the thing to chuck a raquetball a whole 20 feet. In comparison, most people could *throw* the ball about 3 times as far. In disgust, I dismantled the whole apparatus, and we used the throwing arm for ammo in Dale Sulak's CO<sub>2</sub> cannon. Later, I cut off a 3' length, put a brass knob on one end, and a rubber foot on the other, to make a walking stick out of it. It looks pretty good, and will support your weight if you lean on it, without bending *too* visibly.....

Like I said, a fiasco. If you need a rigid, lightweight member, use wood. An 8' 2x2 wouldn't have weighed a lot more, and would have been

### Case #2: The Hydrogen Generators

In experimenting with making hydrogen from the aluminum/lye/water reaction, early tests with glass reactor vessels (actually spaghetti-sauce jars, but it sounds better the other way) were rather nerve-racking, and explosions were only narrowly avoided. So, in what

seemed to be a great idea at the time, I decided to build the reactor vessels out of PVC pipe of varying diameters. The limiting factor was the temperature-resistance of the pipe, but it was written clearly on the side that Schedule 40 PVC was good for about 280 psi at up to 73 degrees. Since the reaction couldn't possibly get much hotter than boiling water, and water boils at 100 degrees, I figured that this would be just funky.

The alert reader will notice that I didn't say what temperature scale I was using above, but will have assumed that I was talking Celsius as soon as I gave the boiling point of water. I thought I was dealing with degrees Celsius, too. This was the Critical Error.

The actual temperature limit was 73 degrees \*Fahrenheit\*. Cripes, that isn't even *lukewarm!* To be fair, the PVC hydrogen generator actually didn't work too badly, for about the first four runs or so. The failure is more of a gradual deterioration, with parts slowly sagging, joints springing leaks, pipe threads distorting and welding together so that the lid won't come off, and similar annoyances. It's kind of reminiscent of sculpting with Silly Putty, where you have to constantly reshape things to keep it from oozing into an unidentifiable blob. The generators are usually only good for about 10 runs before they become unusable. I'm still using PVC for hydrogen generators, because I can't easily get the parts I would need in, say, brass or stainless steel (or even ordinary steel, which stands up to lye reasonably well). But, if I could get what I want, I'd switch over like a shot.

#### Case #3: the Tesla coil

With advice from several people (particularly Ken Hartman and John Ridley), and the assistance of a book called "Gadgeteer's Goldmine," I constructed a middle-sized tesla coil, which after a few teething problems (and resorting to a brute-force approach in places) worked just fine, except for one small detail; the spacing between the primary and secondary coils was just a \*little\* too close, and there was a nice, fat arc striking across that, given time, was obviously going to toast the wire on the secondary coil, and ruin \*everything\*! So, there were two choices; either rewind the primary coil so it was further away, or put an insulator between the two to increase the breakdown voltage. The core for the secondary coil was already made out of 2" PVC, and 3" PVC pipe would fit around it nicely. PVC is an insulator, right?

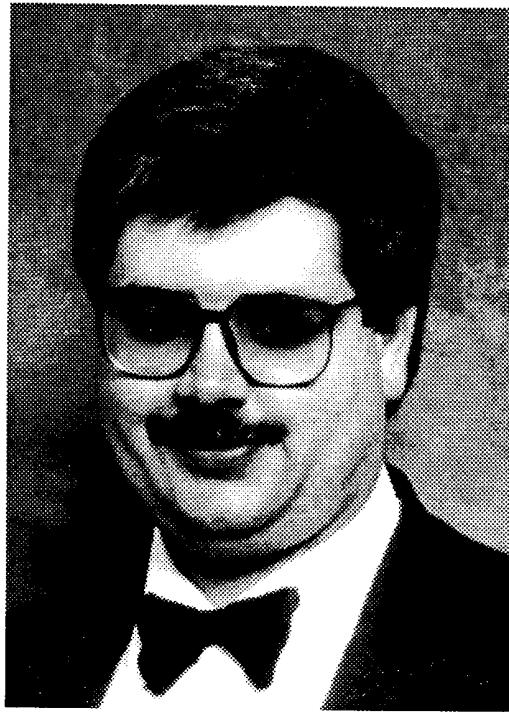
Well, maybe \*normally\* it's an insulator, but not at about 100,000 volts, it isn't. The high-voltage radio-frequency discharge went right through the PVC like it wasn't even there (aside from a slight tendency to "splash" across the surface). It didn't seem to be doing any immediate damage to the pipe though, and we wanted to use the coil at the PFRC table at the MTU "Organizations Fair", so I

crossed my fingers and went for it. It turned out to be not too bad, so long as the coil never operated more than about 1 minute at a stretch. That was about how long it took before it started to smoulder.....

I now have a piece of PVC pipe with a couple of ugly holes that are sort of melted/burned through it. Surprisingly, there wasn't all that much damage to the actual coil, but as time went by, the shorting got more severe (carbon is a conductor, after all), and the arc from the discharge ball (ok, doorknob) got progressively weaker all day. I've now increased the spacing between the primary and secondary, and ditched the PVC "insulator" all together. If anything, the pipe made the shorting problem \*worse\*. And the fumes from burning PVC probably aren't anything you really want to breathe, anyway (but then, neither is ozone).

To sum up, you can get into a lot of trouble by overestimating the usefulness of PVC. It is all right in its place, but its place is unfortunately in kitchen-sink drains. If you need strength, heat-resistance, and electrical resistivity, stick with wood, metal, and glass. Don't say I didn't warn you. ☠

## **IN MEMORIAM, DOUG IFVERSEN**



It is our sad task to inform you all that General Technics lost one of its own the last weekend of July. Doug Ifversen was tragically killed in a boating accident on the lake behind his home. Most of what we know about the sad event comes from Doug's brother Dave (also a GTer).

Doug had just taken his nephew home using a jet-ski to cross the lake to the child's home on the other side. Having dropped him off, Doug turned and went back across the lake towards home. On the way, he was struck from behind by a large pleasure boat towing a water skier. A neighbor heard the impact and called 911 immediately. He then ran out to his own boat to help. He helped pull Doug from the water, but by then it was too late. Doug's neck had been broken and it appears that he died instantly. Charges of negligent homicide have been filed against the boater, and a wrongful death suit is pending.

Doug had been a long-standing member of GT, with many friends in and outside the organization. His death has been deeply felt throughout the fannish and techie communities. Our sympathies go out to his friends and family, particularly his brother Dave, and Doug's wife, Stephanie, who is expecting their first child. A trust fund has been established for the baby; contributions can be sent care of Connie Trembley, 25712 Belleair, Roseville, MI 48066 ☀

—MLSJ & BDG

## REMEMBERING DOUG

A few of Doug's many friends share their memories of him. (Our thanks to Virginia Kasten for collecting these.)

*from Gabe Helou:*

### Doug Ifversen, missed too soon

Many readers of Pyrotechnics lost a good friend last summer. Doug Ifversen was riding his jet ski and was struck from behind by a larger craft. In that instant, a lot of our lives changed forever. Some will remember a man who was quiet and polite. And others will point out how he could get people laughing. Sometimes a practical joker, sometimes a confidant. The person who could take a bosun's whistle and "pipe the captain aboard" as he stepped out of the elevator with a straight face. The person who you could talk to about "how do I handle this."

It does not seem right, using words like "was". It is too soon to be missing him like this. If nothing else, this situation has shown that you can't spend enough time with your friends. There is no way to do his personality justice in just these few words. Nothing written here, no matter how eloquent, can capture his personality, his wit, his presence. Only one person could do justice to Doug, and that person is gone. Time shall not wither our memory of him nor the ages bring us another like him.

*from Audrey Helou:*

I remember him piping aboard Bart from the elevator at Minicon. And without a doubt, Lemon-jitsu will never be the same. <sob>

*from Kelley Trombly-Freytag:*

My two favorite memories of Doug come from when we (Scot and I) shared a house with Dave and him in Hancock for a year.

1) Scot and I had been doing a coffeehouse for Sound and Lighting. I had been drinking a *lot* of coffee and I was very jittery from the caffeine. We drove up to the house, and Doug's car was out front, but no lights were on, which was odd, because it was early for Doug to be asleep. Oh, well. We walked into the dark house, and I headed through the living room to the dining room. Doug, hiding behind the wall, jumped out and yelled "Boo!". I screamed and burst into tears (a very uncharacteristic action, brought about by the caffeine). Poor Doug. He looked so taken aback and upset that he had scared me so much while I was trying to explain, laughing and crying together. It was funny. 2) Scot, Dave, Doug and I were sitting in our "den", watching TV. Unbeknownst to us, there was a hole from upstairs through to the dropped ceiling in the den. Our cat, Whiskey, had found the hole and jumped/fallen through onto the dropped ceiling. We heard this of course, and were quite startled. We then heard this "animal" run across the ceiling panels and over into the dining room and I wondered aloud "Is it a squirrel or what?". The guys all grabbed "weapons" lying around to go "get the animal", when I realize it must be the cat. I yelled "Wait, it might be Whiskey", which they probably already realized, and were charging around with these rolled up magazines and baseball bats, maniacally grinning, shouting about getting the "wild animal". The cat was eventually rescued, after they had their fun with me.

*from Scot Trombly-Freytag:*

Doug was always a quiet individual, but sometimes his practical joke side would pop up - especially when Dave was around. I remember driving a Chevette with Dave and Doug in the back seat when they started rocking from side to side (I believe Doug started it). It was a good thing we were in the middle of an *empty* three lane road (south side of Hancock), and they only stopped when the wheels threatened to leave the pavement. I remember one dark night cruising the backwoods of Houghton in the University Jeep with Doug, Dave, and Kelley, and Doug and I had to make a "pit stop" (too much, um, liquid, yeh, that's the ticket). We were some distance from the car when we heard sounds in the forest. It probably wasn't a bear, but I never knew Doug could run so fast...he almost beat me back to the car!

Like most of us, he used to watch science fiction movies, and help pick them apart, of course. In the movie *Star Wars*, there is a scene where Darth Vader is meeting with the other bad-guy officers in the Deathstar's main conference room - the scene where he chokes one of the skeptics of the Force using "remote control". Instead of watching Darth, we spent the most of one evening using the VCR to freeze-frame through the entire sequence just

to try to figure out if the officers' insignia were consistent.

Doug also had neat toys. His Radio Shack Robot Arm was great fun (is this how he got interested in robotics?), and his remote-controlled hovercraft worked real well in the apartment's bathtub. Good thing the walls were water-resistant....

*from Virginia Kasten:*

First time I met Doug, he was still in high school. He talked about the driving experience of doing a "Smokey and the Bandit" type turn on 8 mile (I think that was the road). I came to consider him one of the gang: the Sound and Lighting Service, Saturday Night Dessert Club, PFRC, and later as one of the founding members of the Southeast Michigan Gluttony Society (SEMGS). He was usually one of the quiet ones, but always willing to chip in a hand. The SEMGS group may remember some of our shopping runs in Grand Blanc, winter visits at Higgins Lake, and at the gatherings in Southfield. Doug was always with us. He helped us move (Gielincki/Kasten, Bob, etc...). Doug was even willing to bring Stephanie to meet the SEMGS gang on one of our Wittig Gathers.

stiffer. ☺

## Quarks

- Barry Gehm recently received an announcement in his mail at Northwestern University Medical Center inviting submissions for the annual "Art in the Atrium" exhibit of artwork by NWU faculty, staff and students (just about everybody got one). It explained helpfully, "The theme for this exhibit is 'Things,' so your work may be an object, or may depict an object or concept." Barry comments: "Kind of limiting, don't you think?"
- We were pleased to hear that the Chicago press is recognizing the excellence of our local GT hangout, Alice Bentley's bookstore The Stars Our Destination. Alice appeared in the *Reader* recently, and, even better, *New City* in its special Best of Chicago issue named TSOD as Best Science Fiction Bookstore. Says Alice, "They gave us a long glowing writeup and managed not to mention that there aren't any other SF bookstores. Hoorah!"
- Chicagoland was a good place for weddings this summer. Congratulations to Susan Johnson and Jim Rittenhouse on their marriage on August 6th; may their mimeographs always crank smoothly. Also in August, Gretchen Van Dorn married filk balladeer Bill Roper in a charming Evanston backyard ceremony on the 27th. It was an occasion that reunited many familiar faces from Chicago's Thursday Night Fandom, an important gathering place in the early years of GT. Ah, nostalgia.

- In the aftermath of the string of comets that bombarded Jupiter, scientists identified many startling new

phenomena. One such was the arrival of Julia Butler-Ehle, described by researchers as a "beautiful, healthy baby girl with dark hair and long fingernails." In a report issued September 14 at Calumet Public Hospital in Michigan, researchers Dan and Hester Butler-Ehle seemed excited by their discovery.

- Speaking of science, the news from Fermilab is that Jerry Guglielmo and Eileen Berman have interacted to create a new particle, Isabeau Tamara Guglielmo. Her rest mass at birth was  $1.8 \times 10^{36}$  electron volts. Our correspondent reports: "The principal investigators, Eileen F. Berman and Gerald M. Guglielmo, first reported circumstantial evidence for a virtual Isabeau in February of this year. Excitement had been building over the past several months as evidence for a virtual Isabeau increased. On September 17th sufficient energy was finally achieved to produce a real Isabeau." More information is available on the World Wide Web on The Isabeau Birth Announcement page, with the URL:

<http://d0sg0.fnal.gov/~gug/isabeau.html>

(First new baby we've heard of with her own Web page.)

- At our meeting to paste up this issue of *PyroTechnics*, Mary Lynn Johnson arrived from the local petting zoo scarred by minor bites from tiger cubs. Guess if they called it a "biting zoo," nobody would visit, though... Barry brought a tape of Bill Higgins's appearance on a radio talk show. We tried to listen to it, but constant interruption with commentary was stemmed only when Dawn urged, "Shut up, Bill! We're trying to listen to you!"

## The Great PopTart<sup>tm</sup> Experiment

**by Dale Sulak and Steve King**

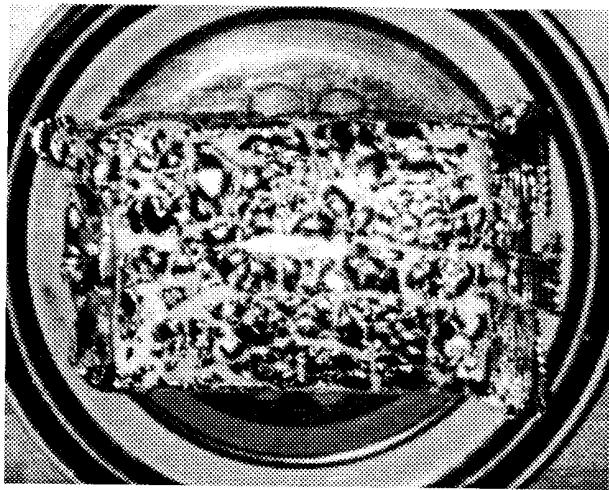
It was a Saturday night, and pizza/munchie consumption was in full swing. The conversation meandered over to the subject of silly food warnings:

"Silica gel - do not eat"..."May become hot when heated"..."Chew carefully, this cereal is extra crunchy"

Someone picked up a box of PopTarts<sup>tm</sup> and read the warning label. One of the warnings struck us as particularly silly:

"Not suitable for microwave use"

Huh? We knew that wasn't true, because PopTarts<sup>tm</sup> are food, and because I had been heating them up in the microwave earlier.



"Well, maybe they think some sue-happy person will forget to remove the wrapper before putting it in the microwave, so they make an unjustified blanket statement?"

"Hmmm, what could happen?"

"I think the trapped moisture would cause the PopTart(tm) to become soggy and unappealing." (Hypothesis #1)

"No, I think that the mylar film has metal in it and that's the reason." (Hypothesis #2)

"Hey Steve, we need to do an experiment..."

Unfortunately for us, Steve knows us way too well, and was resistant to the idea of using a costly, high powered kitchen appliance in the commission of an experiment.

Fortunately for us, the Urge To Know became too great, and Steve volunteered the use of his microwave 5 minutes later. A PopTart(tm) package was placed on a ceramic plate and positioned in the center of the microwave. The plan called for a two step experiment:

- If Hypothesis #1 was correct, something bad would happen after a while.

- If Hypothesis #2 was correct, something bad would happen right away.

Since badness minimization was important (to Steve, at least), the timer was set to 10 seconds, and pushed:

1 sec: Nothing.

2 sec: Nothing.

3 sec: The magneton engages.

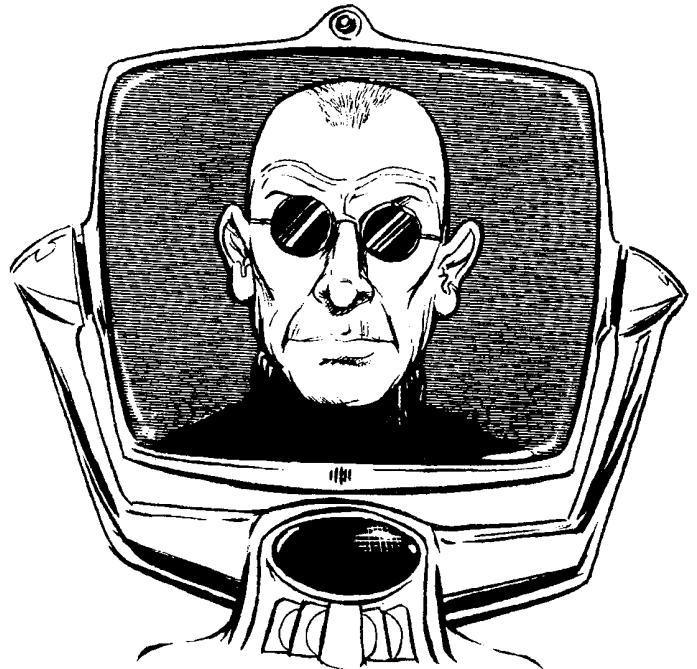
4 sec: \*\*\*\*

The expression on Steve's face was both irreproducible

and indescribable. We both jumped out of our skins! Dale managed to stab the "Open" button first.

What we saw was a Star Trek quality special effect. "Set phasers to puree." A fine network of sparks fully encased the PopTart(tm). The electrical discharge melted cracks into the mylar film so that it looked like quicksilver dry creek bed.

Apparently, the warning label wasn't for sue-happy, forgetful people... ☺



## **VIDIOTIC RAMBLINGS - THE SEQUEL!**

**by George M. Ewing, WA8WTE/4**

*Barney Wouldn't Really Eat an Innocent Little Kid, Would He? Well, Then, How 'Bout a Crooked Lawyer?*

Q. "What do you get when you combine a South Korean dictator and a paleolithic Time Machine?"

A. "Jurassic Park Chung Hee!"

Awright! Michael Crichton has one brilliant, if not entirely original, idea in the novel, namely using prehistoric mosquito blood from insects trapped in amber to get samples of dinosaur DNA. The rest is pretty hokey, but fun. The movie is a lot of fun, if you don't take the "science" very seriously. When the T. Rex eats the crooked lawyer sitting on the toilet, the audience bursts into cheers and applause! However, T. Rex is not a serious threat; he's just too big and easy to kill...even a semi-competent banana republic death squad or WW II infantry platoon

could off him in a minute or two, for the same reason that Godzilla is not a plausible threat to Tokyo, except perhaps if he files an environmental lawsuit in the courtroom; he used to have one hell of a lawyer!

Smart, small, (turkey- to ostrich-size) vicious velociraptors, as originally proposed in the book, would be a more serious threat, but still unlikely to survive encounters with even half-brained game poachers or well-armed Latin American drug farmers, lumberjacks, or construction workers. The much larger raptors that turn up in the movie would probably be easier to see and thus kill. Seen any berserk white rhinos in downtown Nairobi lately?

Sam Neill is cool, and the action is fun and snappy, but mostly dumb. If the Mad Scientists have such fantastic DNA-reading technology that they can re-create hundreds of different species of animals and plants, they've already done the human genome with all its medical secrets, and they're out of the Ross Perot/Yoko Ono billionaire class, and are *seriously* rich, richer than the Federal Reserve or Disney's Ghost. A dinosaur theme park would be a small-change afterthought, and there'd be no financial pressure to cut corners on safety and security systems.

If dinosaurs cost millions of dollars and take decades to grow, they'd be so valuable they'd be *closely* supervised, loaded with telemetry, and most of the security provisions would be to protect *them* from being injured, infected, or destroyed by dumb tourists, lunatic fringe environmentalists, animal-rights freaks, and religious fanatics, not the other way around.

It's easy to take cheap shots at other silly or offensive things in the movie, like using lysine as a control nutrient for a *carnivore*, for heaven's sake! Or not allowing women & kids to carry guns, and silly Hollywood BS involving the electric fences, etc. Still, I enjoyed watching the film, though I was irritated by the much-too-loud soundtrack.

¶

*Excuse Me, Miss... Didn't I See Your Buns of Steel in the Zero-G Orgy Scene in Solar Ratbabies III? ...Oh, Miss?...Miss?...*

*Solar Crisis*, a joint Hollywood/Japanese (NHK) science fiction epic done in the early 1980s, sneaked right by me, and I missed it completely, both in the theater, if it was ever released, and in the video stores, until recently. It may have only been released in English in the last year or two. Anyway, it's an uneven but very interesting dystopian near-future epic with some big-name stars and neat special effects.

The premise is this: it is the near future, and the Solar System is well on its way to being colonized. A series of

very aberrant solar flares over the most recent few years has led to chaotic Earth weather, collapse of many governments, and scads of survivalist desert outlaw gangs, right out of *A Boy and his Dog* or the *Mad Max* movies.

Best scientific opinion says the Mother of all Flares is coming soon, and may destroy everything inside the orbit of Mars except a few command bunkers and heavily shielded space bases dug in on asteroids, etc. A ship with a very large (5 tonne) antimatter bomb is set to attempt a spoiler blast, dropping onto the photosphere of the sun, thus triggering a premature release of plasma from the most active sunspot sites 13 days early, so most of the energy will be blown off on the far side of the sun, missing the Earth and avoiding total annihilation, though the resulting effects will still be very destructive.

Naturally, an evil corporation, reminiscent of RamJac in Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Jailbird*, is out to sabotage things.

Charlton Heston plays a grouchy space admiral whose son is to command the mission, and whose grandson, while hacking at the space academy, learns about the Evil Corporation, escapes a kidnap plot, and is hiding with biker gangs in the desert.

Jack Palance is a retired spacer with *Mad Max* biker connections who hooks up with the kid. There are subplots involving a Spockish android woman who has her brain hacked by Evil Corp. guys, while lusting sexually for the captain, and a sentient AI program which lives in the Bomb operating system, thinks of itself as a Japanese Kamikaze pilot, and is a little smarter than the bomb in *Dark Star*, but only just a little.

There are some really nice spacecraft special effects and an exquisite color holographic model of the Sun on the bridge of the ship which is really worth the 99 cents to rent the movie on tape, and would have been really awesome on a theater screen.

The discussions with the sentient bomb, and a really great argument with an arrogant robot semi-trailer truck with a flawed First Law of Robotics, are as funny as anything in *RoboCop*, serving as high points of an otherwise undistinguished script. There are the usual Hollywood idiocies dealing with radiation, acceleration and gravity, etc. offset by a few techie jokes buried in the background. For example, buried in the Mission Control radio chatter during a spacecraft docking: "Delta vee now at 78, good alignment, now it's down to 45, looking good, now 33-1/3, contact!"

The movie is based on a Japanese SF novel, which might be worth reading if you can track it down in English translation. ¶

*Robo-K.I.T.T.—"Use the Farce, Mr. Iacocca, Use the Farce!" Or "Avast, Mr. Starbuck, Thar She Blows! There be Cylon periscopes off the Starboard Bow...Prepare all Vipers for Launch!"*

Although superficially a silly ripoff of *RoboCop* and *Knight Rider* with a hint of *Max Headroom* and *The Flash* Cyberpunk thrown in, *Viper* may have possibilities! Hollywood and the TV networks have a long and uneven history of this kind of thing: Remember the remote-control detective in *Probe* in the early 70's? Remember the short lived *Auto-Man*, itself a *Tron* ripoff? + the *Six Million Dollar Man* (& woman) and the Bionic Beagle? Remember the Hokey J.T. L.A.S.E.R. in the movie, *The Big Chill*?

There are common themes running through all of this: the hunky hero with the loyal backup team helping him by remote control, a hot, sexy sports car, like the Corvette in *Route 66* or the Ferrari in *Magnum P.I.* or an indestructible juggernaut, like the movie Batmobiles, K.I.T.T., et al. All this is set against the background of a chaotic, corrupt, violent society, such as Detroit in *Robocop* or greater L.A. in *Blade Runner*, often with bumbling, incompetent criminals.

This sort of thing works best when it doesn't take itself too seriously and keeps its satirical bite, such as with the "unfortunate technical malfunction" in the security robot demo early in *Robocop*, and the TV commercials and news bites in the same movie, or the sleazy TV networks in *Max Headroom* and the movie *Looker*, with subliminal advertising that causes couch potato viewers to become invisible or actually explode, and news anchorpersons bribing terrorists to blow things up to jazz up the evening news ratings. The car itself is neat, though the hex-morph transformer features seem pointless so far. Why not a good taxi or garbage truck disguise? C+ for now... ☀

Note: *Babylon 5* (reviewed here previously) received an Emmy for cheap and innovative special effects (done on high-end Amigas with Video Toasters.) As the pilot was fairly successful and was produced for about a tenth of the cost of the *STDS9* pilot, the *Babylon 5* series has been running since late January, '94. Should be fun for a while, anyway. ☀

## I AM NOT SPOCK! (or Anyone Else Famous, For That Matter) by Steven King (continued)

*In our last episode, the author had received e-mail from someone who apparently believed him to be Stephen King, the horror writer. A heavily ironic reply portraying himself as a*

*venal and cynical novelist ("As long as I get paid who really cares? I've learned over the past few years that I can crank out anything and the plebes will buy it") was apparently too subtle, and prompted another message asking about his reading habits and a television appearance. Join us now as the author ups the ironic ante. (The story is true; only the names have been changed to protect the clueless)*

---

From: king@rtsg.mot.com (Steven King,  
Software Archaeologist)  
Subject: Re: your mail  
To: doe@eskimo.com (John Doe)

No, I don't read any other horror. I don't even like the genre much to tell you the truth. When I started writing I looked for a category which was pretty much untapped. You know, the less the competition the greater the profit margin. Science Fiction? No, the big names like Heinlein and Asimov were still going strong. Mystery? No, mystery fans actually expect it to make sense. Spy novels? Not with Ian Fleming still writing. Romance? Actually, I was going to write romance until I started dating Danielle Steele. (Danielle and I have an unspoken agreement that I won't write about love and she won't write about possessed mutant Chevys. Although I've got a fun unpublished porno story in which Herbie the Love Bug falls in love with Christine.)

Horror was the only genre left largely untapped. Daphne du Maurier was writing, of course, but she didn't know how to appeal to the masses. Her books were much too intellectual so they never really got popular. I never really had that problem.

That clip you saw on Comedy Central was from an interview I did earlier. Actually, the words aren't even from that interview, at least not in that order. They just took individual words and rearranged them, like they always used to do in "Mission: Impossible". They used computers to adjust the pitch and tempo and sync my mouth to the words so it looked like I was actually saying them. The actual interview was the contract negotiation for the promo. It really went, "Make my paycheck a little more interesting or you're all going to die." Well, they used the clip and paid me double, so I've got nothing to complain about. The gun I was holding (that hand is off-camera during the whole Comedy Central clip) wasn't even loaded, so they can't say I coerced them.

This negotiation tactic has worked so well that studios now pay me \*NOT\* to come in and do promo clips. I should have thought

of it YEARS ago!

Oh, this is the first time I've noticed your site name. I eat your company's pies all the time! Much better than the inferior Klondike Bars. Need a spokesman for TV commercials? "We're all gonna die" may not be a great slogan for an ice cream snack, but I'll guarantee that my endorsement will triple your sales. How 'bout it?

What fools these mortals be!

| Steven King  
| Motorola Cellular  
| king@rtsg.mot.com

Again I settled back. This time he *had* to get the message, no? No one with more brains than a lobotomized chimpanzee would still think I'm the Famous Author.

An infinite number of chimpanzees will eventually reproduce the complete works of any Famous Author. Apparently it only takes two to send him fan mail. The very next morning I found another message in my mail. This is not from the first gentleman, but from his friend.

From: joeluser@eskimo.com (Joel User)  
To: king@rtsg.mot.com (Steven King,  
Software Archaeologist)  
Subject: Re: Helloah.

I found your address from a friend of mine, who also sent you mail <doe@eskimo.com> I've been reading your books for a few years, mostly since I snagged one of the shelf, as my mom has most of them. I saw you on Comedy Central, too. So...I was just wondering what is in the works now? ObCriticism: I thought that It was kind of boring actually, at least the middle section. I like the beginning and the end, though. (My mom seems to have the same opinion, saying that it is "too repetitive".)

This was getting to be too much. I was convinced these people had decided I was some sort of twisted dial-a-joke. Send me a straight line, and I'd send them a joke back. Dave Kraus, sitting a couple cubicles away, disagreed. His cynicism runs deep and wide, and he firmly believes human stupidity knows no bounds. We all need something to believe in, I guess...

Dave convinced me to write another sarcastic note back to this new guy. I complied, though I still had this vague feeling that I was ending up the butt of the joke somewhere.

=====

From: king@rtsg.mot.com (Steven King,  
Software Archaeologist)  
To: joeluser@eskimo.com (Joel User)  
Subject: Re: Helloah.

But it \*sold\* well, which is all that really matters. I'm thinking of turning "It" into a trilogy. The next two books will be "The" and "A". My friend Piers Anthony tried to convince me to continue the series with "But", "And", and "At" but even I know to stop before things go too far. Leave 'em hungry, I always say.

Watch for me to fake my own death in '95, just as L. Ron Hubbard did a few years ago. Worked for him, ought to work for me. I've already signed a few people to start a hokey religion based on my writings, and have worked out a deal with L (all his close friends just call him "L") to stage an apocalyptic battle between the forces of Good (his Diuretics folks) and the forces of Evil (my soon-to-be-founded Church of Saint Cujo). We've contracted with some of the pro wrestling industry to produce a series of scripts for the "battle". This will culminate in a ferocious one-on-one grudge match between our respective avatars. After we've made all the money we can off of that bit (merchandising alone should net (NET, not gross!) twelve million) L and I will be "brought back from the dead" to carry on our important work in person. This bit was inspired by DC Comics' death and subsequent rebirth of Superman this past year.

-----

Never give a sucker an even break.

| Steven King  
| Motorola Cellular  
| king@rtsg.mot.com

=====

You of course know that this can't be the end of my story. The next day I got *another* note! This one was the scariest of all. It confirmed that Dave was right! These guys had seriously believed I was Stephen-with-a-PH King!

=====

From: joeluser@eskimo.com (Joel User)  
To: king@rtsg.mot.com (Steven King,  
Software Archaeologist)  
Subject: Re: Helloah.

I was just curious as to why your .sig says "Steven" while all the books say "Stephen"? Are you for real? (No offense, but one begins to wonder. I was also wondering why you post from a motorola site.)

I think I would have felt better if these guys had been teasing me all along. To find out that Dave was right and that there *is* no limit to human foolishness... brrr! It gives me the shakes.

At least Joel was starting to see the light. I just couldn't take this any more. I had to let him in on the joke. He had made a couple of connections on his own, indicating that there were indeed neurons firing somewhere in that head of his. Besides, this was a Wednesday. Buy one clue, get one free.

---

**From:** king@rtsg.mot.com (Steven King,  
Software Archaeologist)  
**To:** joeluser@eskimo.com (Joel User)  
**Subject:** Re: Stephen, or steven?

Time to let you in on the secret. No, I don't write horror novels. I write software to control cellular phone calls. (Some say this is just as scary!) I had assumed that my outrageous messages coupled with the wrong spelling of "Steven" and my place of employment would have had "JOKE!" written all over them.

Sorry, didn't mean to lead you on. I get cracks about my name all the time and I get tired of the same old mundane answers I always give.

---

Lately I have the uncomfortable feeling that I've become a character in a Dilbert cartoon.

Steven King
Motorola Cellular
king@rtsg.mot.com

---

Well, that was pretty much the end. I got back a sheepish, "Oops, my mistake" message from Joel. No product endorsement offers or movie contracts have come my way since, so obviously the entire world isn't confused. Too bad, really, I could use the extra money...

I haven't had as much fun with my name before or since. There's still hope, though. Dawn keeps trying to get me to come into Star Our Destination to sign books. Well, I was once paid good money for a real-live magazine article. I don't suppose it would be technically illegal for me to sit underneath a sign that says, "Meet the Author, Steven King". And if the stack of books behind me just *happen* to be of the horror genre... Well, who am I to tell Alice where and how she displays her wares? ☺

## Classified Ads

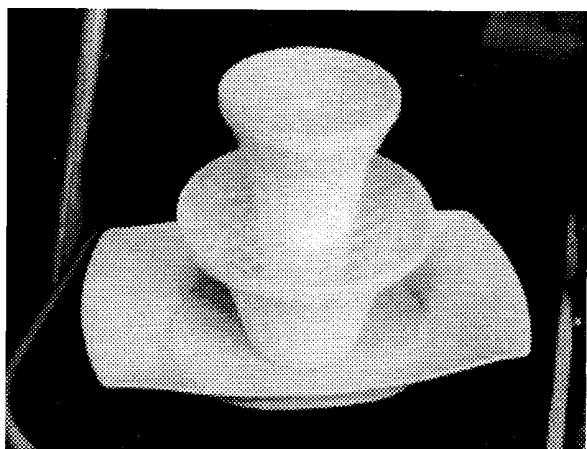
If you plan to be attending Minicon 30 and staying at the

Radisson, here's an important message from the GT suite Priest: rooms are going fast... If you haven't already made a reservation at the Radisson south, please do so ASAP. Then, if you wish to join the GT room block, contact Andy Peed with your name and reservation confirmation number by January 20, 1995:

Phone: (708) 776-0118  
Internet: peed@cig.mot.com  
U.S. Mail: Andrew B. Peed  
1403 Evergreen Dr #301  
Palatine, IL 60067

Remember to mention Minicon when making room reservations, and if you call the toll-free number they may not know what you are talking about.

(612) 835-7800	This is the Raddison South itself.
(800) 333-3333	This is the toll-free number.



WANTED! This is a photo of an old Tupperware set called a "Floralier". For those of you who frequent second-hand stores or garage sales, I would appreciate it if you kept an eye out for them. I will pay \$5.00 each plus shipping if you want cash or I will give you a \$10.00 credit toward any art or framing you want from me (I'll pay shipping on top of that too.) What do I want 'em for? Those who watch Mystery Science Theater 3000 on the Comedy Channel will know them as 'Crow parts'. Those of you who've never seen it before, well, it would be too hard to explain. You can email me at mskirvin@mcs.com or contact me via snail-mail at: Mary Lynn Skirvin, 2131 W. Illinois Ave., Aurora, Ill. 60506. Thanks!

## Misc.

The staff of Pyrotechnics wishes to apologize to Chuck Ott for failing to attribute the contribution of the wonderful mock classified ads in Issue 53

PYRO also wishes to thank Bruce Schneier for the gracious donation of a Macintosh compatible flat bed scanner. Which combined with the talent and effort of many people have brought you this outstanding publication of science and technology.

## **PyroTechnics**

The Now & Then Newsletter of General Technics

Mismanaging Editors      Bill Higgins  
                                  Dr. Barry Gehm

Classified Ads      Sam Paris

Mailing List      Dave Ifversen

Madame Mailbox and Reprowoman      Mary Lynn Skirvin Johnson

Treasurer      Connie Trembley

Layout & Design      Paul MacNerland

Production Manager      Linda Tangalan

### **Small Print Department**

PYROTECHNICS is a publication of General Technics and, (while not copyrighted by one individual), is copyright (c) 1994 by the individual contributors. All rights ARE reserved. All rights revert to those contributors upon publication. Uncredited comments can be assumed to be from one of the following individuals: Bill Higgins, Barry Gehm, Sam Paris, or Mary Lynn Johnson. The ideas and opinions expressed in PYROTECHNICS are those of the individual writers, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editorial staff, General Technics, or the Universe. And as always, thank you for observing all safety precautions!

### **Subscriptions**

are available in the US at \$5.00 for four issues (includes one free classified ad), and \$10.00 for 8 issues. Canadian Rates are: \$6.00 for 4 issues or \$12.00 for 8 issues. Internationally \$9.00 for 4 issues. Amounts are payable in US dollars or International Reply Coupons (available at your local post office. Please make ALL subscription checks payable to CONSTANCE TREMBLEY (and write 'PYRO' somewhere on the check: In the notes field or wherever. Thanks.). If you make your check out to anyone

else we'll have to send it back to you. Maximum subscription length is 8 issues.

Many back issues are available. Please write for a list. Currently our list does not have descriptions of the contents of each issue.

### **Advertising Rates**

A free classified ad of 100 words or less is included in the cost of a four-issue subscription. Quarter page ad - 4 1/4 inches wide by 5 1/2 inches tall = \$8.00. Half page ad - 5 1/2 inches tall by 8 1/2 inches wide = \$30.00. Full page ad - 8 1/2 inches wide by 11 inches tall = \$30.00. Please remember to leave a quarter inch white border all the way around your ad or we will reduce it to fit. Fees for ads are non-refundable after publication. Purchasers of 1/4, 1/2, or full page ads need not be subscribers and will receive a free copy of the issue their ad appears in. All ads except classifieds must be camera-ready.

### **Submissions**

PYROTECHNICS gleefully accepts contributions in the form of art and articles. If at all possible, text should be 10 pt, formatted 3-1/4 inches wide and justified. PLEASE!! If you go to the trouble to format it, make sure that your finished copy is BLACK. Electronic submissions are very welcome. We can read IBM, Macintosh and 8-bit Atari diskettes. Most word-processor formats are OK (MS Word preferred) but please include an ASCII version as well. Submissions can also be made by e-mail to pyro@mystery.com.

Contributions of art can consist of cartoons, fillos, photos, etc. We prefer good black photocopies to original art.

All art and article contributors will receive a free copy of the issue they appeared in, and if that contributor is a subscriber, then the subscription is extended by one issue.

PYRO would also like to retain reprint privileges on all contributions. If you have any serious objections to this, let us know when you submit your material. (Reprints of earlier issues are made and sold to help pay for larger issues, half-tone reproduction, etc.)

Any material sent to PYRO will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. All correspondence should be addressed to:

PYROTECHNICS  
PO Box 965  
Aurora, Ill. 60507



JOHN RIDLEY  
713 CHARLES ST.  
YPSILANTI, MICH. 48198

(8 ISSUES LEFT)

**FIRST CLASS POSTAGE**